

Some early years providers do not use screens - some use them strategically to allow them a moment to regroup or make food - some use them to teach something new or introduce a new theme - some use them because children are tired at the end of the day and they make transitions easier.

Whatever you currently do, you will need to have a conversation with parents about their wishes for their child's screen use in the setting and at home and share the latest screen free guidance with them. You might find, for example, that parents want the entire 1-hour allocation for their child to use at home and ask you to stop using screens.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-screen-time-guidance-for-parents-of-under-5s>

A link to the following screen use guidance will be included in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from September 2026 -

- **Under 2s** - avoid screen time other than for shared activities that encourage bonding, interaction and conversation.
- **2 to 5-year-olds** - try to keep screen time to no more than one hour a day. Avoid at mealtimes and in the hour before bed.
- **Content** - choose slow-paced, age-appropriate content. Fast-paced, social media-style videos and AI toys or tools should be avoided for young children.
- **Co-viewing** - watch or use screens together - talking, asking questions and engaging with the content - is better for children's development than solo screen use.

There is more parent guidance in this blog -

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/new-advice-for-parents-on-screen-time-for-young-children/>

Introducing a new 'screen-free routine; in an early years setting, especially when screens like television or tablets have been used in the past, can be done gradually and positively. The key is to make the transition feel natural, supportive and exciting, rather than restrictive.

## **Making manageable changes**

Change does not have to be immediate - you can take your time and slowly introduce new activities into your daily routines. This will help you to recognise what works and does not work for your current cohort of children.

## **Communicate the benefits**

Start by explaining to both parents and children why a screen-free routine can be beneficial. Use simple, engaging language that highlights the positive aspects, such as:

- Encouraging creativity and imagination - explain to the children that, without screens, we can use our imagination to make up our own stories and games!
- Promoting active play - explain to the children that, when we're not sitting in front of a screen, we can run, jump and explore the world around us.
- Improving focus and attention - encourage the children to think about how screen-free time helps us pay attention to each other and the things around us.
- Building social skills - playing together, talking and sharing are important parts of learning - you can use the screen at home with your parents.

Childcare.co.uk has an information sheet for parents to help you with this conversation -

<https://www.childcare.co.uk/eyfs/parents>

## **Introduce the changes gradually**

If screens have been a consistent part of the routine, don't completely cut them out all at once. Instead, start by offering short, screen-free periods throughout the day, for example, after breakfast or before snack time - these are natural transition points.

Instead of the screen, introduce screen-free activities that are similar to what they've enjoyed on screens. For example, if they've been playing a game on a tablet, replace it with a real-life, hands-on activity that stimulates the same skills but also encourages interaction - a board game, sensory activity or nature walk.

There are more ideas for screen-free activities from Childcare.co.uk in the different planning guides here -

<https://www.childcare.co.uk/childminders/planning>

## **Make screen-free time fun**

To get children on board, make sure screen-free activities are *engaging* and *fun*. Some ideas include -

- Outdoor play - plan activities that get children outside, like a treasure hunt, nature walks or playing with large motor skills - running, jumping, climbing etc.
- Storytime - plan a short circle time activity to read stories or sing songs and rhymes. The children can act out parts of the story or song using props and puppets.
- Arts and crafts - use materials like playdough, paints or recycled objects for building and creating.
- Interactive group games – some of our favourite games are ‘Simon Says,’ musical chairs and simple group games that require teamwork and communication.

## **Plan for digital-free transitions**

Especially useful if the children have relied on screen times to help them with transitions - you will need to support them to adjust by creating new, clear transitions between screen time and non-screen activities, for example -

- Soft transitions - play a song or ring a bell to mark the end of screen time and signal the start of something else.
- Guided activities - lead the children into a activity, explaining how fun and interesting it will be.

## **Model the change**

It is important that you model the behaviour you are expecting to see from the children. For example, if you spend time on your phone or a computer, you are not setting the example children need.

Talk to parents about any changes you need to make to communications during the day and set aside time to message and update parents at the start or end of the day, so you are screen free too.

You can then talk about the changes you have made with the children.

## **Work with parents and carers**

It's important to involve parents and carers in the process, so they can continue the screen-free routine at home and use the 1-hour for 2–5-year-olds mindfully -

- Offer ideas for resources - share tips, ideas and even a sample schedule of screen-free activities that work for you so they can try them at home.
- Collaborate - have a meeting or send home a newsletter to explain the benefits of reducing screen time and give them strategies for managing it at home.

You might want to share research and the latest screen use advice to support these points in a way that's easy for parents to digest.

## **Celebrate successes**

As the screen-free routine becomes more familiar, celebrate the small victories with both parents and children! It can be as simple as -

- Highlighting a child's creativity or teamwork in a screen-free activity.
- Sharing success stories in newsletters or parent meetings.
- Showing children that they can have fun without screens.

## **Resistant parents**

You might find that some parents are resistant to your screen-free routine or that they feel you cannot tell them what to do at home Or maybe they felt their child learned a lot from the screen activities you currently provide and don't want you to make changes.

Change is possible - you need to listen, acknowledge and use empathy while sticking to your values.

## **Acknowledge their concerns**

Start by validating any concerns parents may have. For some, screen time can feel like an easy way to entertain or manage their child, especially during busy moments. Recognising their concerns can create a space for open dialogue and show them you're on the same team.

For example, you are not trying to tell parents what to do at home so you explain that you understand that screens can be a helpful tool, especially when you're juggling so many things at home. We're not saying screens are bad, but we want to create more opportunities for your child to explore the world around them, develop their imagination, and build real-world social skills.

## **Provide evidence-based benefits**

Some parents may be resistant because they haven't seen the research or don't fully understand the benefits of limiting screen time in young children. Provide them with information but make sure it's accessible and relevant, for example -

- Share expert recommendations - refer to guidance from organisations like the DfE or World Health Organisation (WHO) which recommend limited screen time for young children and highlight the benefits of hands-on, real-world play.
- Share the 'why' - explain how play without screens helps develop cognitive, emotional and social skills. For example, children who engage in more interactive play tend to have stronger language development and better social skills.

For example, you might reassure parents that, research shows that young children who have more opportunities for face-to-face play, creative activities, and outdoor time tend to develop stronger language skills and problem-solving abilities.

## **Focus on collaboration and compromise**

Rather than presenting the change as an ultimatum, ask parents to work with you. Emphasise that this is a partnership and that their input is valuable.

Acknowledge that transitions take time and that flexibility is key - maybe suggest a trial period of screen free activities to see how things go.

At the same time, parents might find it useful if you share information about the practical, screen-free alternatives you are going to use in your early years setting - a list of resources, songs their child is singing, books you are reading, outdoor toys their child enjoys, craft ideas etc instead of screens.

When you have successes, share them with parents - talk about the ways their child has made progress in their play, social interactions or learning.

For example, you might share that one of your parents mentioned that their child has started reading more books at home and is even making up their own stories. It's amazing to see the creative boost that screen-free time has given some of early years children.

Reassure parents that the 1-hour screen time is guidance - and you are doing your best in the setting so their child can use it as needed at home. You are seeing how it goes - and likely will still allow their child to enjoy the movement songs they love or watch informative programmes or look things up on the computer together to answer their questions.

Your goal in the setting is to reduce screen time in favour of more enriching activities rather than banning it altogether. You will keep them updated.

There are some exemptions for early years children - the guidance says that normal time limits should not be applied in the same way to -

- Screen-based assistive technologies.
- Communication aids
- Tools supporting accessibility, learning or regulation for disabled children.

The government's press release specifically states that, 'Time limits shouldn't apply in the same way for screen-based assistive technologies to support children with special educational needs and disabilities.'

## A sample screen-free daily routine

### 8 - 9am - Arrival and settling In

Children arrive gradually - set out activities:

- Self-registration - name cards, photos.
- Free play: blocks, puzzles, role play, mark-making.
- Quiet book corner

**Focus:** smooth transitions, independence, emotional security.

### 9am - Circle time

A short, interactive time to gather together and start the day:

- Welcome song - 'hello *child's name*, how are you?'
- Simple group discussion about what you are going to do during the day.
- Introduce any changes.
- Read a book.
- Movement or action songs and rhymes.

### Morning - Activities

Set up your continuous provision areas and play alongside the children, modelling language and joining in to support learning:

- Construction - blocks such as wood, magnetic, Lego and loose parts.
- Role play and dressing up.
- Creative area for painting, collage, playdough and arts and crafts.
- Sensory - sand, water, scooping tray.
- Outside movement - climbing, bikes, nature play, den building.
- Small world play.

### 10:30am - Snack time

Gather the children to change nappies / toilet where needed - wash hands.

Sit with the children at the table and set out a tray so they can help make their snack. Encourage independence - pouring drinks, tidying up, wiping the table washing the plates in a bowl of soapy water, drying up and putting away etc.

## **Rest of the morning - Small group adult-led activities**

Short, focused sessions to support children's 'next steps' and develop their learning:

- Activities linked to the book you read during circle time.
- Early maths through games and playful interactions.
- Tabletop activities depending on your current focus.
- More music and movement activities.
- Physical play - keep the children moving to support their engagement.
- Nature exploration in the garden.
- Group games to support friendships and turn taking.

## **12pm - Lunch**

- Ensure the children can move before you ask them to sit.
- Change nappies / toilet and hand washing.
- Sit with the children (statutory requirement) and encourage conversation and independence.
- Talk about the food and promote healthy eating.
- Support children if they need it with opening packets etc in packed lunches.

Mealtimes should be a relaxed social time. Children can help tidy up afterwards - see morning snack.

## **Early afternoon - Rest and quiet time**

This can be a tricky time in early years settings because not all children sleep and you are not using the TV or screen time as a babysitter, so you will need to offer carefully thought-through alternatives:

**Sleepers** - follow safer sleep requirements using cots / mats in a quiet space with reduced lighting.

**Non-sleepers** - offer books, mark making / drawing and calm sensory activities.

Some early years settings have 'busy bags' or baskets and trays for quiet times that they set out on tabletops for the children to explore.

You will need to be present to support the children's play which might be hard during the transition period (if you previously used screens) because you will not have a break.

## **Late afternoon - Activities**

More of the same from the morning - set up complementary activities in the house and garden and support the children with their play.

Towards the end of the session, tidy up with the little ones, plan nappy changes / toileting and prepare the setting for the older children coming back from school so there are activities ready. They will not ask for screen time if you have set up for them.

### **3pm - School run**

If required, take the children with you on the school run.

Talk about the day - spot animals or letters and numbers - play games on the journey.

If you travel by car and the children are used to watching screens during this time, you might want to research and use audio books - you can often download them free from the library.

### **3.30pm - After school**

Children can play with the set-up activities or make up their own games.

Older children might want a quiet space to do their homework.

Think about how children can play together independently if you are making tea or sitting quietly with a cuppa for a few minutes before mealtime.

### **4.30 - Before tea / tea time**

At some point you will need to help the children tidy up and introduce a movement activity - in our early years setting we plan a music and movement or active storytelling session - before asking them to sit for food. In our early years setting, we also spend time talking about the day.

Those children who eat tea can sit at the table and chat together with you. As you won't have screen time to occupy the children after tea (if used previously), you will need to find time to wash up and tidy after the children have left - this might mean adjusting your own family schedule.

### **Home time**

Children typically leave at different times and many early years settings have used the TV or screen time to help them with the transitions.

If you are going screen free you will need a plan to keep the children left in the house busy while you are seeing other children to the door. You might find it useful to have your busy bags / baskets set up with familiar toys, books and calm role play or some mark making.

Ensure the resources are quick to put away so the transition is not stressful for the children.

### **Key adjustments**

- Ensure the younger children have more access to movement activities and sensory play.
- To manage the longer days for you, add a few more outside activities and teach the children how to use new resources, so they can play independently.
- If you have limited space, you might find it best to write up a quick plan and rotate resources through the week. [Childcare.co.uk](http://Childcare.co.uk) has lots of guides to help you with this process.

## References

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- DfE Early Years Foundation Stage for childminders for early years children.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

- DfE screen free guidance for parents.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-screen-time-guidance-for-parents-of-under-5s>

- Ofsted Early Years Inspection toolkit.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>

Other references when used are noted in the text.

## Further information

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